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Georgia House members slam fellow Republican's bill they assert would lighten up on sex offenders

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By [Christina A. Cassidy](#)

ATLANTA | The business of the Georgia House of Representatives came to a halt Friday as several Republicans took the floor to publicly condemn a colleague's bill as a move that would loosen sex offender restrictions in Georgia.

House Majority Leader Larry O'Neal, R-Bonaire, called the bill introduced by fellow Republican Rep. Sam Moore of Cherokee County "one of the most egregious" pieces of legislation. Under the bill, Moore would repeal sex offender loitering restrictions at schools and child care facilities.

Moore, who took office last week after a special election, said his goal was to eliminate vague anti-loitering laws. His bill, however, was met with open hostility.

"I am not only embarrassed; this state should be embarrassed. This country should be embarrassed that anyone would even consider something like this," said Rep. John Meadows, R-Calhoun.

Meadows serves as chairman of the powerful Rules Committee, which sets the daily House agenda. He vowed Moore's bill would never pass through his committee for a floor vote. Meanwhile, Majority Whip Matt Ramsey, R-Peachtree City, called the bill "one of the most callous and ill-conceived efforts that is an affront to the safety of children."

In the end, about a dozen lawmakers took the floor in an unusually public condemnation of a colleague's bill. During the back-to-back speeches, Moore sat quietly at his desk near the back of the chamber.

After the House recessed, Moore told reporters he was shocked by what his colleagues had to say and argued there were better laws already in place to protect children than the anti-loitering one at issue.

"It's an election year, and I get it," Moore said. "It didn't surprise me that people would want to distance themselves from it. But the vitriol that came out, this was the worst thing I have seen in my whole life."

Moore said he thought it was unfortunate his colleagues didn't reach out to him beforehand and chose to attack him publicly.

"I'm honestly trying to do the right thing," Moore said, citing his concern for the Fifth Amendment and protecting citizens from government abuses.

House Speaker David Ralston, meanwhile, condemned the bill and said it was not a Republican-backed measure.

"That bill chooses to stand with sex offenders and pedophiles, and that is something I can't fathom," said Ralston, R-Blue Ridge.

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